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THE CATONSVILLE, Md. LUTHERAN CHURCH

A Sketch of its Origin

BY

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THE

CATONSVILLE LUTHERAN CHURCH.

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1. EARLY GERMAN SETTLERS.

Catonsville is the name most widely applied to the southwestern corner of Baltimore County, Maryland, although there are no precise limits to its territory. Prior to the Revolutionary War this section was known as Hunting Ridge, and is frequently mentioned in the early land grants. It was settled in Colonial times chiefly by English-speaking people, who were largely members of the Church of England and of the Society of Friends.[1] That there were a few Germans among these early settlers is shown by the occurrence of German names in the land records of the time, but their number was so small that they probably felt no need for a church of their own. As all trace of these early emigrants was later on lost, it seems likely that they were absorbed in the English population of the region and their names completely Anglicized.

Shortly after the year 1830, however, there was a considerable influx of German emigrants to the valley of the Patapsco River,[2] and a group of these new settlers are known to have located in the Catonsville region. One of the earliest of these was Mr. Johann Kolb (Apr. 15, 1814–Dec. 16, 1897), who removed about the year 1835 to the section now known as Harlem Lane when the whole neighborhood was a mere wilderness.[3]

[1] Cf. George C. Keidel, *The Colonial History of Catonsville*, Art. 35 (published in the Catonsville Argus, 1912–1913).

[2] Cf. the statement made by Eduard Leyh in a work entitled *Baltimore* published by C. C. Bartgis and Bro. in 1887, p. 300.

[3] Statement made on October 14, 1910, by his daughter Miss Minna Kolb to George C. Keidel. This is the earliest date so far obtained for a German settler.

The manner of their coming seems to have been about as follows. A certain Mr. William T. Somerville, who at that time lived near the present St. Agnes Church on the Old Frederick Road in all probability, was one of the largest landowners in Catonsville in his day. The advent of so many prospective settlers to the shores of the Patapsco doubtless suggested to him the idea of dividing a portion of his estate into small lots to be offered for sale. This land was located on both sides of what is now known as Harlem Lane, and the very appropriate name of Germantown was given to the new settlement—a name which in the course of years has been entirely lost.

The land in question had been granted by Lord Baltimore, the Proprietor of Maryland, to one Hen. Davis, for whom it was surveyed for one hundred acres on March 8, 1706, when it received the euphonious name of Nannie's Fancy, later corrupted to Nancy's Fancy.[4] This latter form of the name is still found in the deed made on May 5, 1855, by William T. Somerville to John Dollpoff (should be Dollhopf) "for all that piece or parcel of Land situate and lying in Baltimore County aforesaid being Lot No. 6 on the plat of Germantown and being also a part of a tract of Land called Nancy's Fancy."[5]

When the first German settlers arrived the locality was probably still known as Caton Village, so named after Richard Caton (1763–1845) and his wife Mary Carroll (1770–1846), daughter of the celebrated Charles Carroll of Carrollton (1737–1832), who were married Nov. 25, 1787.[6]

A description of Catonsville in the year 1844 written some years ago by a member of St. Timothy's Church enumerates a few families living near the Frederick Turnpike, and then adds: "These, with a small German Settlement on and

[4] See records still preserved in the Land Office at Annapolis.

[5] See Baltimore County Court House, Towson, Land Records, H. M. F. 12, p. 457.

[6] See a plat of the division of Mary Caton's estate preserved in the office of the Clerk of the Court at Towson. (Vidimus, Nov. 4, 1918.) The form "Catonville" occurs in a codicil to the will of Charles Carroll of Carrollton drawn up on February 5, 1827. (Published in life by K. M. Rowland, vol. II, p. 420.) This spelling of the name could not be verified on the original document unfortunately.

near Ingleside Avenue, which was then called the New Cut Road, formed the then village of Catonsville."[7]

These early German settlers attended the services at St. Timothy's Church after its founding in the year 1844; but increasing rapidly both in numbers and worldly possessions they soon came to feel the need of a church of their own which would appeal to them in their native language and allow them to worship God after their own fashion. It was probably some time during this period that there was paid to them the traditional visit of Father Heyer, a German minister affectionately thus known and then on leave of absence from his mission post in India, to which he returned in the year 1847.[8] Father Heyer is commonly reputed to have been the founder of the Catonsville church.

2. ORGANIZATION OF SALEM CONGREGATION.

It was no doubt due to the impulsion given by Father Heyer that Mr. Gustav W. Lürmann (Sept. 11, 1808–July 8, 1866), a prominent Baltimore merchant residing in Catonsville, soon after undertook the formation of a new German congregation of Lutherans and Reformers from among his widely-scattered Protestant fellow-countrymen in Baltimore, Howard and Anne Arundel Counties near the point of their junction.

The first meeting for organization was held on Sept. 30, 1849, in the frame building situated on the East side at the bend in Ingleside Avenue about half-a-mile north of the Frederick Turnpike. Fifty years later this home was occupied by Mr. Jacob Reich, son of Mr. Paulus Reich, who was probably one of the original members of Salem Congregation. Such at least was the local tradition at the time of the Golden Jubilee Celebration in the year 1899.[9]

[7] Compare an anonymous typewritten account now in the possession of George C. Keidel through the kindness of the editor of the Catonsville Argus.

[8] Rev. Carl Friederich Heyer, born at Helmstedt, Germany, July 10, 1793, died at the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia, Nov. 7, 1873. He was both a home and a foreign missionary. See *Lutheran Cyclopedia*, New York, 1899, p. 222.

[9] See *Semi-Centennial Salem Lutheran Church* (by George C. Keidel), Catonsville Argus, Sept. 30, 1899.

The Lutherans appear to have been in the ascendant in the new church organization and drew the Reformers after them, the few German Catholics among the early settlers soon after joining with those Catholics who spoke English to form the congregation of St. Agnes Church nearby.

3. PURCHASE OF A CHURCH LOT.

On January 27, 1845, Mr. Joseph P. Fusting (name originally spelt Füsting), who was one of Catonsville's pioneers and whose lifework was later everywhere apparent in the village, purchased from Mr. Peter Hause and his wife Maria Hause a tract of land which was a part of Lot No. 108 of the Baltimore Company's lands, originally belonging to a large patent named "Frederick Staddt Enlarged" granted by Lord Baltimore to Col. Benjamin Tasker of the City of Annapolis and Company in virtue of a special warrant dated March 14, 1747.[10]

This plot of ground was triangular in shape and comprised about two acres of land. It had a long frontage on Ingleside Avenue a short distance south of its intersection with the Ellicott's Mills Road (later known familiarly as the Old Road). The consideration named in the deed to Mr. Fusting in 1845 was two hundred dollars, and the transaction was duly witnessed and recorded in the land office at Baltimore, the county-seat of Baltimore County at that time.

It is probable that some time prior to the year 1845 Mr. Hause had erected a log cabin on his property, for the lot had on it a schoolhouse valued at a modest one hundred dollars in an insurance policy when on November 1, 1849, Mr. Joseph P. Fusting and Caroline Fusting his wife sold it to the Trustees of Salem Church for the sum of three hundred dollars,[11] which was advanced to the new congregation by Mr. Gustav W. Lürmann. The existence of

[10] Recorded at Annapolis, Land Office, Warrants P. T. 3 (15), pp. 456–457. For a history of this land grant see George C. Keidel, *The Colonial History of Catonsville*, Arts. 25 and ff.

[11] Baltimore County Court House, Towson, Land Records H. M. F. 3, pp. 365–366: "J. P. Fusting to Vestry of German Luthern (!) Salem Congregation."

this log cabin is furthermore attested by a record in the Church Register under date of November 11, 1849, to the effect that Mr. Fried. Ludw. Maisel had purchased a stove for the schoolhouse for the sum of eight dollars and a half. It seems likely that the congregation used the schoolhouse as a place of worship during the winter of 1849–1850, although no definite statement of such use has been found.

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4. ERECTION OF A CHURCH EDIFICE.

The congregation having now secured a spacious site located on the top of a high ridge and commanding a beautiful view of the surrounding countryside, there came up the serious question of the erection of a suitable house of worship. Various plans for the proposed edifice appear to have been considered. Many years later Dr. Adalbert J. Volck (1828–1912), the well-known art connoisseur of Baltimore, distinctly remembered having sketched such a plan at the instigation of Rev. John G. Morris (1803–1895), the well-known Lutheran divine; but his plan was in the end probably considered too ambitious for such a poor congregation to carry into effect.

At the time of the Semi-Centennial Celebration there was still in existence a colored sketch for a church edifice made by the stonemason Johann Moessmeringer, and preserved by the family of Mr. Johann Kolb. The building was eventually erected according to this last-mentioned plan, although with certain minor alterations in the design. The sketch itself was at this time framed and hung on the wall of the old church. There is evidence to show that the building was completed by June 3, 1850, as the Montgomery Company issued under that date an insurance policy on it for the sum of fifteen hundred dollars.

The erection of the church was made financially possible by the contribution either as loans or gifts of five hundred dollars by Mr. Gustav W. Lürmann, three hundred dollars by the German consul at Baltimore, Mr. Albert Schumacher (1802–1871), and two hundred dollars by Mr. Robert Lehr (1820–1887), another Baltimore merchant.[12] In addi-

[12] Under date of March 5, 1919, Mr. Robert Oliver Lehr of Baltimore writes that "The subscriber to the Catonsville Lutheran church must

tion to this the members of the congregation contributed labor and material without thought of remuneration.

The stonework of the main walls was constructed by Mr. Johann Moessmeringer, assisted by Messrs. Friedrich Hahn, Heinrich Schaub and Robert Dill. The last-named was then a mere schoolboy, and at the time of the Golden Jubilee he was still alive and active in his calling. The woodwork of the church was made by Mr. Caspar Kuemmet, assisted by Mr. Johann Kolb, as well as by others.[13]

5. DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH.

A general invitation to the public was given in the following advertisement published in a Baltimore paper on June 15, 1850:

☞ CHURCH CONSECRATION.—Will be consecrated TOMORROW, (Sunday,) June 16, the new German Lutheran Church, near Catonsville, Baltimore county. This really beautiful little church, its gothic style, its rising tower, and its neat mechanical execution and finish, would be an ornament to any neighborhood, but is particularly so to this, since from its elevated position it overlooks the whole surrounding country: and the steeple seems to be a spiritual light-house, guiding to the port of Heaven, or a lightning-rod averting the sin-begotten thunders of the Almighty.

The service, which will be accompanied with vocal and instrumental music, will commence at 9½ o'clock, A.M. The Rev. Benj. Kurtz will preach the first sermon in the German language and the Rev. L. Van Bokkelen, Rector of St. Timothy's Hall, will preach the second sermon in the English language. After Divine service, some refreshments will be served up, under the shelter of the surrounding woods, music enlivening the scene. At 3 o'clock, P.M., Divine service will again commence, The Rev. Dr. Morris preaching the English, and the Rev. C. A. Brockman the German sermon. All friends of religion and education are invited to attend. A collection will be taken up for the liquidation of the debt of the church. 1t*.[14]

This notice is evidently from the pen of the Rev. L. Van Bokkelen, the local Episcopal rector. Rev. Benjamin

have been another, as I do not believe my father would have been interested." And yet all the other evidence points that way.

[13] See *Semi-Centennial Salem Lutheran Church* (by George C. Keidel), Catonsville Argus, September 30, 1899.

[14] See *The Sun*, Baltimore, Saturday, June 15, 1850, Vol. XXVII, No. 25, p. 2, col. 3. This item, as well as the item quoted below, was found in the Library of Congress files.

Kurtz (1795–1865) was a well-known Lutheran divine, and Rev. Dr. Morris was later the veteran pastor of Lutherville, Md., and the Nestor of the Maryland Synod.

Whether or not this ambitious program was carried out has not been ascertained, but on the next day the following paragraph appeared in a Baltimore newspaper:

Dedication. The new German Lutheran Church at Catonsville, Baltimore county, was dedicated yesterday. It is a very neat edifice, of Gothic style, surmounted by a pretty tower. The Rev. Benjamin Kurtz and the Rev. L. Van Bokkelen officiated during the day in the German and English languages.[15]

It has not been ascertained how the congregation was served prior to the dedication of the church on June 16, 1850, but tradition will have it that from that time on Rev. Charles A. Brockman was the pastor.

6. PASTORATE OF REV. C. A. BROCKMAN.

The newly installed pastor seems to have been a man of some energy and determination, and many years later it was stated by his successor Rev. Geo. W. Ebeling, Ph.D. (1821–1901), that he was reputed to have fraternized with his parishioners with considerable success.

Through his efforts a frame parsonage adjoining the old schoolhouse on the south was erected in 1851; and it was about the same time apparently, to judge from the oldest dates on the tombstones, that the churchyard began to be utilized as a burying ground.

The original records of the organization and official acts of the congregation appear to have been either lost or destroyed many years ago. But a copy of them had previously been made by the first pastor in a large book acquired for that specific purpose and begun in the year 1852, as appears from a statement written in German on the title-page.

[15] See *Baltimore Clipper*, Baltimore, Monday Morning, June 17, 1850, p. 2, col. 3. Yet compare the following extract from a letter to the author: "Maryland Diocesan Library, Jan. 27, 1919. . . . I have examined the report of the Rev. Libertus Van Bokkelen to the Bishop, for the year 1850–1851, and find no mention of his having taken any part in the dedication of the Lutheran church at Catonsville . . . Frank M. Gibson, Librarian."

To attempt to enumerate the members then belonging to the congregation would be to name almost all the progenitors of the older Protestant German families for miles around. The earliest extant list seems to be that for the year 1852, and this comprises in all some forty-three names. Such locally familiar family names occur as: Maesch, Ege, Gerwig, Leimbach, Spelshaus, Wessling, Knuepling, Piel, Renz, Dill, Schneider, Maisel and Reich. This is direct evidence to show the early date at which these families were established in or near Catonsville.

Hardly had the pastor moved into the new parsonage when the angel of death began to knock long and loudly at his door. First his little boy Charles A. Brockman, born October 9, 1850, passed away on March 24, 1853; then his wife Caroline Brockman, born August 13, 1823, died on May 3, 1854; and finally her baby boy Frederick W. Brockman, born April 22, 1854, was taken on June 28, 1854.[16] These names and dates are to be found on a simple marble slab a few feet to the south of the church building, and their mute evidence shows what sorrow suddenly befell the first Lutheran pastor in Catonsville.

To these severe personal trials were added dissensions in the small congregation; and so it is not surprising to learn that some time during the summer or autumn of the year 1854 Rev. Charles A. Brockman gave up his pastorate and removed elsewhere. Such are the meagre details to be set down in reference to the life and pastoral work of the first incumbent of the Lutheran pulpit in Catonsville.

7. THE CHURCH GRAVEYARD.

Prior to the building of churches in the neighborhood of Catonsville it was customary to inter the dead in private

[16] On November 2, 1918, the following inscriptions were copied by the writer from their joint tombstone:

In memory of Caroline, Wife of Rev. Charles Brockmann Born 13, Aug. 1823, Died 3, May 1854. Charles A. Born 9. Oct. 1850, Died 24, March 1853 Frederich W. Born 22, April, and Died 28, June 1854. Sons of Cha^{s} & Caroline Brockman.

It will be noticed that they are very crude in form; and it is probable that some of the names have been Anglicized.

burying grounds;[17] but these were in course of time gradually abandoned, and burial was made usually in the neighboring churchyard, and still later in one of the public cemeteries.

Hence we find that soon after the purchase of the two-acre plot of land and the erection of the church edifice the congregation determined to set aside a portion of the land for a graveyard in which all members of the congregation should be entitled to free burial. This right in a modified form was still in force at the time of the Golden Jubilee in the year 1899, although the custom of acquiring family lots had already largely superseded the earlier method.

In the new Salem Churchyard the graves were at first dug side by side and end to end without regard for order, or the possible future needs of the congregation. Many graves were left without a distinguishing mark of any kind, in some cases not even a mound of earth being raised over the coffin. Thus as the years passed all trace of a grave sometimes disappeared, and in the older portion of the churchyard it is now in many instances impossible to definitely affirm the existence of such, and still more a matter of guesswork to attempt to count the number of graves in a given area. When after a lapse of some forty years paths were at length laid out, it was at times found convenient to make them directly over some of the oldest unmarked graves; yet even then irregularities of alignment were inevitable in some instances.

The burying ground appears to have been started at a point a few feet south of the church, and then to have spread in all directions until towards both the east and the south the boundary lines of the church lot were reached. After this progress was made towards the west and behind the church itself; and lastly a strip of ground was taken from the garden of the old parsonage on the north side of the edifice. The result has been that all the older graves are clustered in a small area a short distance to the south of the church, and it is here that the graves of the original mem-

[17] See *The Pierpont Burying Ground at Catonsville, Baltimore Co., Md.*, by George C. Keidel, in *The National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, Vol. VII (1918), p. 25, cols. 1–2.

bers of the congregation are in general to be sought. No definite record of burials appears to have been kept, and not even their total number for the first half-century seems to be ascertainable. But it may perhaps be justly estimated that about two hundred persons were buried in this churchyard during the first fifty years after the congregation was organized in 1849.

Many of the earliest German emigrants to the locality were destined to find a last resting-place within its peaceful borders, among the very oldest of whom may be mentioned the following persons born in the eighteenth century and who attained to ages ranging from sixty-four to ninety-four years:[18]

1784–1868, Georg Maisel;
1785–1864, G. Wise;
1786–1864, Charlotte Wehland;
1787–1871, Georg Heinrich Wehland;
1794–1876, Hermann L. Piel;
1794–1880, J. Heinrich Zehner;
1796–1863, Johannes Bässler;
1796–1869, Philipp Pielert;
1797–1872, Johannes Heidelbach;
1797–1891, Marie Knüpling;
1799–1863, Wilhelmina L. Dettmar;
1799–1867, Jacob F. Rentz;
1799–1869, Michael Dill.

Most of these were doubtless born in Bavaria, and probably all of them in the Fatherland, having emigrated to America in most cases when past middle life. To this latter class belongs the writer's grandfather (buried in Loudon Park Cemetery):

1799–1874, Georg F. W. Keidel, M.D.

Just after the turning of the century we find the following:[19]

[18] This list was made by the writer about the year 1895 directly from the tombstones; it was shortly afterward published in the Catonsville Argus. It is now reprinted here from the original typewritten copy, although the list itself is perhaps not complete.

[19] The writer paid a visit to Salem Churchyard on November 2, 1918,

1804–1861, Anton Lauman;
1808–1865, Justena Ruff;
1808–1865, Lewis Sellman;
1809–1866, H. H. Wehland;
1809–1874, Paulus Reich.

Deserving of special mention in this connection is the following old couple buried in Loudon Park Cemetery:

1801–1892, John F. Pfeiffer;
1806–1888, Justina Pfeiffer.[20]

Finally there may be noted the name of the real founder himself (buried in Greenmount Cemetery, Baltimore):

1808–1866, Gustav W. Lürmann.

The descendants of these early settlers living in or near Catonsville are legion, and many of them are still remembered by persons who are now numbered among the oldest residents of the neighborhood.[21]

Other early members of Salem Church are no doubt buried in Loudon Park Cemetery near Baltimore, or in other cemeteries and private burying grounds near Franklin, Hebbville and Ellicott City. It would doubtless be impossible at this late date to make a complete list of them, and besides the few instances cited above no attempt has been made to search for their graves. Apparently only a few of the early members removed from the neighborhood, for as a

when he succeeded in obtaining these names and dates from the tombstones. Though assuredly very incomplete, this list has the merit of adding four more family names to those cited above, two of them well represented in the community in later years.

[20] These names and dates were copied by the writer from their joint tombstone a short distance south of the entrance on April 21, 1919.

[21] On May 26, 1919, the writer found among the Carroll manuscripts in the Library of Congress a receipted bill from Jno. H. B. Latrobe to Charles Carroll of Carrollton, which was dated December 16th, 1830, and in which the form "Catonville" was used three times. Compare also the following extract from a letter to the author from J. C. Koons, First Assistant Postmaster General, dated Washington, May 31, 1919: "... the post office at Catonsville, Maryland, was established as Catons Ville on January 20, 1831, and the name was changed to Catonsville on November 11, 1831." (Note added on page proof.)

rule when once settled in their new homes they were content to remain where they were until the day of their death.

And so in the seventieth year of the congregation's existence the old church and the old tombstones bear mute witness in their quiet rural nook far from the main lines of present-day travel to the passing of the era of first settlement now long since brought to a close. Time brings many changes both to places and people, and those that are gone have passed on to their eternal reward, while leaving behind them faint memories of their loves and labors here on earth.

And thus will we leave them undisturbed!